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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9400
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE 0245
RHMFIISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE

UNCLAS YAOUNDE 001077

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE ALSO FOR AF/C AND INL/C

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KCOR PGOV PREL ECON EINV CM
SUBJECT: CAMEROON ANTI-CORRUPTION DRIVE NETS ANOTHER
EMBEZZLER

¶1. (U) Cameroon's anti-corruption drive, dubbed Operation Epervier ("Sparrowhawk") by the Cameroonian public, has netted another government official for embezzlement. Jean Dieudonne Ndoumou, most recently assigned to the Prime Minister's office, was detained by judicial authorities during the week of October 20 for reportedly pocketing funds meant for a much-needed power development project in Kribi, along Cameroon's southern coast.

¶2. (U) In his position as the Kribi Divisional Officer from 2000 to 2003, Ndoumou received funds from Cameroon's National Oil Company (SNH) that were meant to pay local communities for land that would be used to construct a gas-fired power plant in the town of Bipaga. The Government of Cameroon claims that Ndoumou pocketed the first installments of the 696 million CFA (about \$1.4 million) he received. Ndoumou's arrest follows on the detention, during the week of October 9, of the village chief and notary for Bipaga II (a community adjacent to Bipaga I, the intended recipients), who were charged with embezzlement, forgery and use of forged documents. Press reports indicate that further arrests, including of some SNH officials, may follow.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: Ndoumou is not a household name, and his arrest will not attract the banner headlines rolled out for earlier, more high-profile arrests. But in some ways Ndoumou's case is more significant for Cameroon's longterm anti-corruption and development efforts. Many observers criticize Operation Epervier's early arrests as politically-motivated since they also removed some officials perceived as disloyal or threatening to President Biya. Whatever the veracity of those claims, there appear to be no such undertones with Ndoumou and his collaborators, who are being prosecuted simply because their embezzlement has caused substantial setbacks to a much-needed economic development project (and came at the cost of SNH funds, which are guarded with particular proprietorship by Biya and SNH boss Adolphe Moudiki).

GARVEY